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New York

President: Mr. Ping ..... (Gabon)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 39 (*continued*)

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

Draft resolution (A/59/L.58)

Mr. MacKay (New Zealand): New Zealand expresses its deepest condolences to the countries and communities affected by the unprecedented catastrophe that has struck parts of Asia and Africa. The immediate impact of the disaster was felt by millions of people. In addition to the tragic loss of life and the suffering caused by injury, many of the poor have had their livelihoods and other assets destroyed. We need to ensure that the poor and marginalized are the central focus of the reconstruction phase.

As recognized at the international meeting for the 10-year review of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, held last week in Mauritius, the tsunami has shown in stark terms the vulnerability of developing States, including small island developing States.

New Zealand has been among those actively offering assistance since the earliest days of the tragedy. We have been assisting directly in the field as well as through the international community, and we strongly support the operations mounted by and through the United Nations system. We have augmented that support with direct bilateral assistance to some of the affected countries and by teaming up with other donors.

Prime Minister Helen Clark announced yesterday that New Zealand's official response to the relief and reconstruction efforts has climbed to 68 million New Zealand dollars, inclusive of the 10 million dollars already announced for the relief effort, and that it is New Zealand's largest response ever to an international relief and reconstruction programme. That level of support enables us in particular to make a substantial contribution to the United Nations flash appeal for the afflicted region, to continue to match the generous donations being made by individual New Zealanders to the appeals for funding and to target New Zealand aid funding to Aceh, on Sumatra.

The Government response will consist of the following: 20 million New Zealand dollars for United Nations tsunami relief efforts; 20 million New Zealand dollars for the bilateral programme of the New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZAID) in Indonesia to enable it to support relief, reconstruction and development work in Aceh; 19 million New Zealand dollars for dollar-for-dollar matching of public donations; 4 million New Zealand dollars for other contributions, including through non-governmental organizations; and 5 million New Zealand dollars to cover costs incurred by New Zealand Government departments and agencies in responding to the tsunami, particularly to fund the contribution of 25 New

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Zealand police and civilian staff deployed to the international disaster victim identification operation in Phuket, Thailand. About 113 New Zealand Defence Force personnel were deployed to the region with aircraft, loading and medical teams and communication specialists.

New Zealand will also support international efforts to assess tsunami risk and enhanced worldwide tsunami warning coverage. We look forward to the outcome of this week's World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe, Japan.

The New Zealand relief and reconstruction response that I have just outlined is only the first step in what will be a long-term recovery process. Like others, we are looking to help during the next stages of rehabilitation and reconstruction. All donors need to ensure that their delivery of aid is credible through good humanitarian donorship; that it addresses poverty by distinguishing the needs of the poor; and that it is managed professionally by applying the principles of harmonization. And we must all, of course, ensure that our focus on this crisis does not divert us from international efforts to address chronic poverty in many other developing countries.

As we contemplate enhanced long-term bilateral support for Indonesia and the channelling of support for longer-term reconstruction and rehabilitation in Sri Lanka, let me conclude by saying that we will also strive to continue supporting the ongoing activities of United Nations agencies and programmes as they, too, move on to the next phases. New Zealand will be there for the long haul.

Practically no country has been left untouched by this disaster, including my own. In this respect, I should like to take this opportunity to express New Zealand's sincere gratitude for the assistance offered by our regional neighbours, and by Thailand in particular, to those New Zealanders who were caught up in the tragedy.

Mr. Jingree (Mauritius): On behalf of the Government and the people of the Republic of Mauritius, let me once again express our deep condolences to the families of the victims and to the peoples of those States that have suffered a huge loss of life and social and economic damage as a result of the earthquake and tsunami that struck the Indian Ocean and the South-East Asian region on 26 December 2004. The trauma caused by this disaster cannot be overestimated.

The disaster, unprecedented in its nature and scale, was matched by unprecedented worldwide solidarity with the affected populations. My delegation expresses appreciation for the prompt response of the international community through immediate relief efforts to the affected countries and the spontaneous and generous contributions of civil society, the private sector and individuals, highlighting once again the spirit of international solidarity.

My delegation wishes to commend the affected countries for the bold efforts that their respective authorities have displayed in addressing the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami. I should also like to express our sincere appreciation for the important and immediate role played by the United Nations, particularly the personal involvement of Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Jan Egeland, in addressing the aftermath of the disaster and ensuring an optimally effective aid response, cooperation, mobilization and delivery of international assistance in the emergency relief phase.

Over and above the immediate emergency relief efforts, we must ensure support for the medium- and long-term rehabilitation and reconstruction and risk-reduction efforts of the Governments of the affected countries.

The recent earthquake and tsunami, and the spate of hurricanes that hit the Caribbean region last year, highlight the increasing number and scale of natural disasters and their growing impact, with massive loss of life and critical damage to socio-economic infrastructure. Their long-term negative social, economic and environmental effects cannot be overestimated, especially in relation to their impact on vulnerable groups in developing countries, including small islands.

My delegation wishes to underscore the importance of promoting the concrete realization of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, especially in relation to its provisions on vulnerability, risk assessment and disaster management. Disaster reduction, reducing vulnerability and building resilience in the event of natural disasters contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.

The recent earthquake and tsunami triggered a debate on the need for the establishment of regional early warning mechanisms for disaster prevention, development and the strengthening of response preparedness, mitigation and contingency planning, as well as measures to prepare communities for future disasters. Indeed, had the Indian Ocean had an early warning system, many lives could have been saved last month.

It was in this context that the Mauritius International Meeting to Review the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, which concluded on Friday, 14 January, devoted a large part of its work to the tragic impact of the 26 December Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami. Almost every delegation represented at the International Meeting referred to the vulnerability of small island developing States to disasters such as the recent tsunami.

The Mauritius Declaration adopted at the International Meeting recognized the tragic impact of the earthquake and tsunami of 26 December 2004, as well as the spate of hurricanes that hit the Caribbean and Pacific regions, and stresses the need to develop and strengthen disaster risk-reduction, early warning systems, emergency relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts.

The Mauritius Declaration, while welcoming the Declaration of the Special Meeting of the leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, held in the aftermath of the recent tsunami, fully supports the proposed establishment of a regional natural disaster early warning system for the Indian Ocean and the South-East Asian region. The Declaration also supports the call for enhanced international cooperation and partnerships to build and manage effective regional early warning systems, public education and awareness and disaster management.

In the Mauritius Strategy for the further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, adopted at the International Meeting, the small island developing States undertook to strengthen their respective national frameworks for more effective disaster management. In that regard, they committed themselves, with the necessary support of the international community, to strengthen the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and related small island developing State regional mechanisms and facilities to improve national disaster mitigation, preparedness and early warning capacity, among other measures.

Almost three weeks after the tsunami in the Indian Ocean, people are still suffering as a result of its devastating effect. Humanitarian assistance is making a difference on the ground, but the fear of further suffering resulting from the spread of disease and epidemics cannot be overlooked. The international community must therefore stay the course and redouble its efforts in order to focus on the medium- and long-term reconstruction of those countries struck by the tsunami. Mauritius, for it part, has, within its modest means, supported the relief effort for the victims of the tsunami by making a token contribution.

Finally, my delegation fully welcomes the decision of the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, meeting in Kobe this week, to discuss the issue of regional and early warning systems as part of its agenda. Let us hope that the Kobe meeting takes concrete and action-oriented decisions which will help all countries, big and small, face such disasters with the least possible damage and destruction.

Mr. Le Luong Minh (Viet Nam): At the outset, on behalf of the delegation of Viet Nam, I wish to express to you, Mr. President, and to your staff our great appreciation for your swiftness in reconvening this session of the General Assembly.

As a member State of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which initiated the request to reconvene this session, Viet Nam fully aligns itself with the statement made earlier by the representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic on behalf of ASEAN. We hope that the draft resolution introduced by ASEAN and co-sponsored by a large number of countries will be adopted by consensus, thus reflecting the solidarity of the international community and its resolve to overcome the consequences of a disaster of a magnitude beyond our imagination.

From this podium, on behalf of the Government and the people of Viet Nam, I wish once again to express to the Governments, the people and the families of the victims in all affected countries our most profound sympathy and our sincerest feelings of solidarity. With more than 160,000 people losing their lives, tens of thousands still missing and millions

displaced in a matter of minutes, the damage caused by the tsunami is unprecedented. For those who have died, we can only wish peace to their souls. The most important task of the international community now is to help restore normalcy to the lives of the affected people.

In that connection, we are pleased to note that the response of the international community has also been unprecedented in terms of its swiftness and scale. Billions of dollars have been committed for assistance to the affected communities. Numerous humanitarian activities are taking place on the ground. Major steps have been taken by the international community in seeking to work together not only to overcome the consequences of the tsunami, but also to prevent further catastrophes.

Those steps include the special ASEAN leaders' meeting on 6 January in Jakarta, which adopted a declaration setting forth a set of actions to be implemented, covering various areas from emergency relief to rehabilitation, reconstruction and prevention; the Ministerial-level Meeting on Humanitarian Assistance to Tsunami-Affected Communities, held in Geneva on 11 January; the Secretary-General's launching of the Indian Ocean earthquake-tsunami 2005 flash appeal and his appointment of a special coordinator to coordinate international emergency relief operations in support of national emergency programmes of countries affected by the tsunami and covered by his flash appeal; and the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe, Japan, which, as we are meeting here today, is discussing, inter alia, the establishment of regional mechanisms for the surveillance, prevention and assessment of severe natural disasters. Viet Nam welcomes and supports those timely measures and looks forward to contributing to their implementation.

Immediately after learning of the losses and damage caused by the tsunami, the Vietnamese Government, in a gesture of sincere sympathy and solidarity, decided to donate approximately half a million dollars to help the victims in the most seriously affected countries. Vietnamese private citizens and social organizations have been actively responding to the appeals of the Vietnamese Government and of the Red Cross Society of Viet Nam to make financial and in-kind donations. According to incomplete statistics, approximately 2.5 billion Vietnamese dong — nearly $200,000 — have been raised to date, and the campaign is continuing.

Let me conclude by assuring members that at this difficult moment the Vietnamese Government and people will continue to join hands with the international community in concerted efforts to overcome the challenges ahead of us.

Mr. Dajer (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Honduras on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States. On behalf of the Government of Colombia, we want to emphasize our most heartfelt condolences to all the States and victims affected by the tragedy that occurred on 26 December 2004.

The contributions and pledges made demonstrate the commitment of States, the international community and men and women throughout the world to overcome this catastrophe. My delegation welcomes the statement by the Secretary-General to the Assembly yesterday, in which he expressed his concern that the attention of the Organization and the international community be kept focused on this issue for the long term.

It is important that the United Nations system work with States to strengthen early warning mechanisms and to consider new forms of prevention. That would give States a greater capacity to respond to possible future tragedies. The prevention and management of tragedies such as the one that occurred on 26 December — which claimed more than 160,000 victims — deserve full attention, such as that given by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. This human tragedy challenges the United Nations to focus its coordinating efforts on humanitarian assistance in the event of natural disasters and to improve its response capacity.

We believe that the effective, efficient, timely and transparent management of human, material and economic resources will ensure that our assistance attains its objectives.

Mr. Khalid (Pakistan): The delegation of Pakistan associates itself with the previous speakers in expressing our deepest condolences and solidarity with regard to the victims of the tsunami disaster in the affected countries. The people of Pakistan are shocked and saddened by this natural calamity, and it is our

utmost desire to contribute in whatever way we can to restore normalcy in the areas struck by the calamity.

Being a neighbour in the region, Pakistan was among the first to respond to the human suffering following the catastrophic earthquake in the Indian Ocean. The Prime Minister of Pakistan, His Excellency Mr. Shaukat Aziz, approved an amount of at least $50 million for the people affected by the tsunami. The Minister of State for Foreign Affairs immediately visited Sri Lanka and Indonesia to express our solidarity with those countries. Pakistan has sent 12 relief sorties of C-130 aircraft to Sri Lanka and Indonesia, and the Pakistan navy has dispatched three helicopters, an expeditionary force, a medical team and engineering support equipment to those countries. Two Pakistan naval ships that were available in the tsunami-hit region of the Maldives participated in the relief and rescue operations for six days. Relief goods were distributed by helicopter, and 367 persons from 21 countries were evacuated.

In addition, the President of Pakistan has set up the President's Relief Fund for Tsunami Victims. The newspapers and electronic media have been mobilized for this purpose, and people from all walks of life are generously contributing to the Fund.

Edhi Foundation, a major Pakistani charitable organization, has dispatched relief goods worth 20 million rupees to Sri Lanka. The Church World Service of Pakistan has also sent donations, while the private TV channels have run telethon broadcasts to raise funds.

We are in favour of establishing regional early warning mechanisms to prevent such disasters. The Prime Minister, in his capacity as Chairman of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, has called for evolving a mechanism for an Asia-wide early warning and disaster response regime.

Pakistan is gratified that the international community has responded promptly and generously to help the victims of this disaster of unprecedented proportions. We appreciate the efforts of the United Nations in coordination and facilitating the global relief work. Pakistan will continue to support international efforts which bring quick succour to the affected people and hasten the process of reconstruction and rehabilitation in the countries hit by the tsunami.

Mr. Al-Ourabi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation welcomes this meeting of the resumed fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly on the strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance.

This meeting is being held in the wake of the tragedy that affected the countries of South-East Asia following the tsunami and the earthquake that shook the coastal countries. Kuwait would like to extend its condolences to those countries, which have suffered such a great loss of human life and economic losses on an unprecedented scale. We express our solidarity with those States and our determination to help to alleviate their sufferings directly or through international agencies.

In that connection, we welcome the unity of the international community, as manifested in this determination to lend economic assistance and emergency aid to alleviate the sufferings of the countries of South-East Asia and the Indian Ocean. We would like to commend the role played by the United Nations and its specialized agencies in coordinating and providing humanitarian assistance.

Kuwait deems it imperative that humanitarian assistance be provided to those States stricken by the tsunami and stresses the importance of coordinating humanitarian aid and economic assistance. That is why Kuwait responded promptly by contributing to alleviate the effects of the disaster. Kuwait believes that assistance must be well coordinated in order to help ease the suffering of the affected countries.

The Council of Ministers adopted a series of resolutions beginning on 26 December allocating $2 million to helping the countries of South-East Asia to overcome the crisis. It instructed the Committee of the Red Crescent in Kuwait to provide assistance of various kinds to the peoples affected. On 2 January, the Council decided to allocate a further $8 million. On 9 January, the Council of Ministers agreed that overall Kuwaiti humanitarian assistance to the States affected would total $100 million, broken down as follows.

First, $30 million was allocated to emergency assistance, humanitarian and logistical, and the Committee of the Red Crescent decided to coordinate such assistance with the international agencies working in that area. Secondly, the Kuwait Fund for Arabic

Economic Development has decided to give $70 million.

The Government of Kuwait also decided to entrust the various authorities involved with the task of cooperating with civil and charitable associations in conducting a campaign among the people, and, as a result, more than $12 million was presented on behalf of his Royal Highness and of the President of the Council of ministers.

The scope of the natural disasters that we have witnessed in recent years, and the loss of human life and damage to economic and social infrastructures, especially in developing countries, requires that the international community strengthen its coordination and intensify its spirit of solidarity in order to overcome these crises, or at least mitigate their effects.

Here, we would like to underscore the need to establish an infrastructure that would allow for the provision of such assistance. We would ask the developed countries to help the developing countries to set up such infrastructure by lending the necessary technical assistance.

In conclusion, we hope that this humanitarian assistance will continue in future in order to help the stricken countries, and that the international community and the United Nations, along with international agencies, will continue their efforts to meet the short- and long-term humanitarian and development needs of the countries stricken, with the goal of alleviating the devastating effects of these disasters, be it in the economic, environmental or other sphere.

We hope that the financial commitments made by the donor countries will allow us to overcome this crisis, and that those commitments will not come at the expense of official development assistance. Kuwait fully supports the draft resolution that has been submitted and that we have added our name to the list of sponsors.

Mr. Menon (Singapore): Mr. President, at the outset, I would like to thank you for having convened this resumed session of the fifty-ninth General Assembly. In associating myself with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, delivered on behalf of the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and sponsors of the resolution, I would like also to join other speakers in extending my profound condolences to the countries which were hit by the earthquake and tsunami on 26 December last and to the millions of people from many countries and all five continents who have been affected in one way or another by this sudden tragedy.

It is indeed a tragedy, not only in terms of the disturbing statistics involved, but in terms of the lives torn asunder, the communities destroyed, the hopes and dreams extinguished, and the suffering and sorrows left behind. While Singapore itself was unaffected by the tsunamis, some Singaporeans lost their lives, while others are still missing. On Sunday, 9 January, an inter-faith memorial service was held in Singapore in remembrance of all of the victims of this great calamity.

The world has responded most admirably to this tragedy. Countries big and small have pledged generous sums of aid and also valuable help in kind. Contributions have come not only from countries, but also from many companies and private individuals who felt that they simply had to do something. In that regard, we commend the Secretary-General and Jan Egeland for their outstanding leadership during this crisis, and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the various United Nations agencies for responding swiftly and dealing effectively with the massive problems on the ground in all the affected countries.

Singapore is a small country whose contributions can only be a trickle in the ocean of assistance needed from the international community to help the affected countries. But geographic proximity to many of the affected countries, together with our well-developed communications and logistics links, as well as our status as a medical hub in the region, made it possible for us to respond speedily to the plight of many of the affected countries. Hence, our relief efforts reached our affected neighbours quickly, when they were most needed. In that regard, we deployed most of our available and relevant civil defence capabilities and military heavy-lift assets, including helicopters and landing ships, as well as cargo planes, to help create access to various communities that had been ravaged and cut off by the disaster and to provide those communities with fresh water, food, medicines, shelter and other basic needs. We also facilitated the relief operations of international and non-governmental organizations and other Governments by, inter alia,

making available our air and naval bases on a pro bono basis as staging areas for their operations.

At the same time, we have witnessed an outpouring of care and support, with individuals, private companies and hospitals in Singapore sending medical and technical relief teams to the affected countries and contributing much-needed supplies and equipment, including power generators and water treatment plants. Singaporeans and others living in Singapore have also donated over $20 million so far to help tsunami victims and families.

One of the key challenges facing the international community is effectively to deal with the medium- and long-term needs of the countries affected by the catastrophe. In adopting the Jakarta Declaration on 6 January 2005, the leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and other participating countries, as well as of international organizations, clearly acknowledged that helping the affected would entail efforts in emergency relief, rehabilitation and construction that may take five to ten years with resources that cannot be borne by any individual country. There is therefore a fundamental need for the United Nations and the global community to respond collectively to restore normalcy and to help rebuild the affected countries. Countries need to house and shelter their homeless, build schools and clinics, restart local economies and rebuild shattered communities.

Completing those tasks will take several years. Singapore is convinced that the only way that this can be achieved is through a sustained engagement of the international community in the medium- to long-term reconstruction of the affected countries. We were therefore heartened to hear the Secretary-General's statement yesterday that he would, by the end of the week, be responding to the call of the leaders who met in Jakarta by appointing a special representative. In our view, the special representative will play a crucial role in sustaining international attention and political will for the long-term effort. Past tragedies have shown that the world's attention span is, unfortunately, relatively short.

It is also crucial that the world find ways to mitigate the risk of disasters caused by tsunamis. The forces of nature can be benign, but at the same time destructive, unforgiving and unpredictable. There is an urgent need to put in place an international early warning system for tsunamis in the Indian Ocean. While we can, in time, rebuild what we have lost, we should take the appropriate steps to prevent a similar disaster from happening again.

We are all in this for the long haul. In solidarity with other affected countries, we will do our part in the international efforts towards rehabilitation and reconstruction. We stand ready to maintain our close cooperation with the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross, other international organizations and institutions and the international community at large to assist affected countries. We have similarly worked with many delegations in preparing the draft resolution before us, entitled "Strengthening emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and prevention in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster," which we are confident this body will adopt by consensus, thereby signalling our strong and continued commitment to helping the countries and peoples affected by that terrible tragedy.

Mr. Talbot (Guyana): My delegation takes this opportunity to extend condolences on behalf of the Government and people of Guyana to the countries in Asia and Africa affected by the tsunami disaster of 26 December and to the countries of other regions whose nationals perished in the tsunami tide.

The Government and, indeed, the people of my country were profoundly touched by the unprecedented scale of the disaster — the catastrophic loss of human life, amounting to over 170,000 persons to date, and the magnitude of displacement, devastation and dislocation. Millions of people — a large number of them children — are now displaced or homeless.

At the same time, we are heartened by the overwhelming international response to the tragedy. We commend the Secretary-General and his team for the pivotal role being played by the United Nations system in that effort. We are grateful to the Governments and people of many countries that have pledged and are providing generous support.

My own country, within its modest means, has joined the global response. On 6 January, the President of Guyana, Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo, presented a contribution of $50,000 to the United Nations Children's Fund representative in Guyana for that purpose. The contribution of the Government has been exceeded by the generosity of the Guyanese people, who — facilitated by private-sector and social

organizations within our country — have to date mobilized more than $100,000 for the relief effort.

Guyana continues to stand in solidarity with the Governments and peoples of the affected countries in their efforts to provide relief and, in the long haul, to ensure recovery and reconstruction, and trusts that the international community's response will indeed endure over the long term.

Natural disasters have grown in scale and intensity in recent years, and 2004 was especially noteworthy in that regard. The tsunami in Asia was preceded by devastating hurricanes and tornadoes in the Caribbean and North America, and destructive phenomena in other parts of the world. Even as I speak, my own country, Guyana, a low-lying coastal State, is experiencing the worst floods to have hit our country in over 100 years. That has led my Government to declare three of the 10 administrative regions of Guyana, including our nation's capital, as disaster areas. Those areas are home to over 60 per cent of our population.

Our current experience serves only to further cement the bonds of empathy and solidarity with the countries and peoples affected. Guyana is therefore pleased to lend its full support to draft resolution A/59/L.58 and to join as a co-sponsor.

Mr. Al-Haiky (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): We are meeting today less than a month after one of the most tragic natural disasters that we have ever witnessed. We are deeply distressed by the tremendous damage wrought in certain countries of the Indian Ocean region by the destructive underwater earthquake and the giant tsunamis that it generated, killing vast numbers of people. We extend our condolences to the Governments of the countries and the families of the victims, and we express our sympathy and solidarity with the survivors of the disaster.

Such natural disasters occur suddenly, without warning. Thus the international community needs to react immediately to bring relief and assistance to the victims and to ensure that the effects of such calamities can be contained in order to prevent disease and hunger from spreading. Experts from the World Health Organization and other agencies responded quickly and informed the international community that the number of victims of disease and hunger could exceed the number of victims of the tsunami itself.

Thus, an immediate response is required. His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the Emir of Qatar, has decided to provide the maximum assistance to the victims. Qatar was among the first countries to provide assistance. Thus far, some $25 million in assistance, including food aid, medicine and other products have been transported aboard Qatari aircraft to the affected countries. The immediate relief provided by the State of Qatar reflects the spirit of solidarity and fraternity that binds us with the peoples of the stricken countries. It is also the natural result of the State policies pursued by His Highness the Emir of Qatar, which stress the importance of providing assistance to developing countries that need it urgently in the event of natural disasters such as those experienced recently.

We are meeting here today to discuss ways and means of mitigating to the greatest extent possible the impact of the substantial damage suffered by the affected countries. We cannot remain idle, waiting for similar disasters to happen. We must as far as possible strive to limit the impact of such disasters in the future because it would be terrible if a similar natural disaster again caused such a loss of human lives, when we possess the technology, such as early warning systems, to counter it. We support international efforts to establish an early warning system, such as that which already exists in the Pacific Ocean, for the Indian Ocean and other regions that could face a disaster of this kind. The proposal before us, which my country sponsors, forms a good basis for coping with such catastrophes.

We believe that the material support and the human solidarity shown by many countries around the world is very encouraging, and we commend and welcome it. At the same time, we need to respect our commitments. We should not simply make pledges and promises. We must truly come to the assistance of the countries in need. That is the least that we can do when natural disasters occur.

Mr. Guterres (Timor-Leste): We welcome the convening of this meeting at the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly to discuss issues related to the tsunami disaster that occurred in the Indian Ocean on 26 December 2004.

We felt shock when television screens showed the images of the tragic deaths, the destruction and the suffering of our fellow human beings in the devastated

areas, reaching from the Asian to the African shores of the Indian Ocean. That unprecedented natural disaster affected millions of lives in many countries. The psychological, environmental and socio-economic problems it created will have long-term effects.

The solidarity and the humanity manifested by the international community, the United Nations, Governments, peoples and business, as well as by humanitarian institutions from the North, South, East and West, are also unprecedented. It is morally rewarding to witness the strong bond of solidarity between peoples and countries and to see warships, helicopters and soldiers from various countries using their strength to save lives and to bring food and shelter to families in those devastated regions.

The Government of Timor-Leste has decided to make a modest financial contribution. We believe that it is our moral duty to express our solidarity with the peoples and the countries affected by the tsunami. The President of my country, Mr. Xanana Gusmão, is leading an ongoing public campaign to gather more financial support. We have also joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in sponsoring the draft resolution before the Assembly.

Today is a great opportunity for the United Nations, Governments and scientific institutions to find solutions that can help mitigate the effects of natural disasters. We hope that the meeting in Kobe, Japan, will produce strong recommendations in that direction. We support the establishment of an early warning system, as recommended by the ASEAN countries.

Finally, we would like to reiterate our condolences to the peoples, the countries and the families affected by the disaster in the Indian Ocean area and on other continents.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the Observer of the Holy See.

Archbishop Migliore (Holy See): My delegation would like to express once again its deepest condolences to the concerned countries and add its support for those measures intended to strengthen emergency relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction, as well as prevention, in the wake of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster.

Since the very start of the emergency, His Holiness Pope John Paul II has expressed his deepest sympathy and has committed the agencies of the Catholic Church to act in a genuine gesture of solidarity with all peoples, without exception, in each nation touched by that enormous tragedy.

Our institutions and the papal representatives present in the affected countries went into action immediately. First, they provided food and clothing and sheltered the affected populations. Tragically, it has become clear that the most affected group has been young children, of whom at least 50,000 were swept away; but there are also tens of thousands left orphaned. For those reasons, we are placing special emphasis on ways to bring help to surviving children in the worst affected zones.

In cooperation with the Pontifical Council Cor Unum, a very long list of Catholic agencies is already using funds from throughout the world, amounting to nearly $500 million, some of which is going into emergency aid and the rest into longer-term projects through our local networks. Non-governmental organizations and other faith-based organizations in the field now need to be allowed to work directly with the populace, while the aid from multilateral funds should be distributed equitably among the affected regions without political, ethnic or religious bias and in dialogue with the various stakeholders.

The extraordinary impact of the power of nature within a radius of thousands of miles has elicited an equally extraordinary response from the peoples and Governments of the whole world in an outpouring of sympathy and solidarity rarely seen in recent times. Such a swift and practical expression of global solidarity is surely a sign of the fundamental decency of the peoples of the world. It is clear that, regardless of the things that separate us, there exists a deep sense of our shared humanity and fragility in the face of such terrible events.

It seems clear that this is an emergency whose aftermath is going to last through the medium and long term, and so it is to be hoped that the solidarity of private citizens and Governments alike will not die down once the world recovers from the initial shock of the calamity.

In addition to strengthening emergency relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction, as mentioned in the draft resolution that is before the Assembly, the world's nations should seize this opportunity and the goodwill generated by the world's peoples so as to further important humanitarian goals on the broader

agenda at this time. There is now a sense of humanitarian momentum, and we should not let it slip by. We owe it to all concerned to redouble efforts aimed at bringing a rapid and just political solution in those areas still suffering from conflict.

Moreover, some have expressed concern that the tsunami disaster might distract people's attention from other issues, especially the concerns of the small island developing States and this year's review of the Millennium Development Goals. It is well known that 25 million people throughout the world still suffer bitterly due to largely man-made wars, disasters and mismanagement.

My delegation earnestly hopes, therefore, that this year solidarity will be the hallmark of the political agenda so as to help all nations refocus on ways to achieve the development goals agreed upon at the start of this millennium.

Finally, my delegation takes this opportunity to congratulate all those who have been so rapid and generous in their response to the tsunami disaster, including the Secretary-General and the members of the agencies of the Organization. It now falls to the United Nations to become once again a great driving force, dedicated, courageous and humanitarian, as it is in the best moments of its history.

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with General Assembly resolution 49/2 of 19 October 1994, I now call on the observer for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Mr. Gospodinov (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies): In this very, very special debate, I am probably the last speaker today representing an organization that was among the first to react. Let me also express our deep condolences to all those who suffered and who lost their loved ones.

It has been three long, nightmarish weeks for those who survived the waves yet lost so much and so many. We have all committed our hearts and minds to alleviating the effects of that disaster, and, as we look ahead, we hope that the worst is behind us.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) welcomes the decision of the General Assembly to hold a special debate on the urgency of strengthening emergency relief. It provides us with an important opportunity to stress the priority that must be given to disaster preparedness and disaster response, together.

It is well known that the IFRC, working with its network in every country, is at the forefront of providing emergency relief on the ground following natural disasters. The point was stressed on 11 January by Mr. Jan Egeland, who spoke of "the crucial role of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies as the first line of defence against suffering and disease" in disaster situations.

The Asian earthquakes and tsunamis of 26 December 2004 were followed by tremendous support, at an unprecedented level, from private citizens and the corporate sector. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all Governments and all missions in New York, which gave us such strong support. Their contribution acknowledges the immediate response of our volunteers and trained staff in the countries directly affected following the disaster. Our volunteers were on the spot and providing rescue and relief services before news of the catastrophe had even reached the outside world.

Our assessments enabled our headquarters in Geneva to issue the first preliminary appeal for support just eight hours after the disaster struck. We are now at work in all 12 countries that were directly touched, providing support to help reunite families and assisting the tremendous number of people who have lost relatives and friends.

Details of our work can be found on our web site, so I will spare members the statistics relating to what we do. Our people can be seen on the television screen every day. I will simply note that it shows that thousands of Red Cross/Red Crescent volunteers, staff and emergency response units are achieving a great deal. To provide just one example, this is the largest-ever water and sanitation deployment in our history.

There has been interest from around the world in our work. This is in recognition of the fact that we are in a unique position. We are the only international organization with a grassroots presence in virtually every country and community in the world. We are also a federation of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, which are auxiliaries to the public authorities in their respective countries, which means they have special legal status. At the outset, the Federation and its member national societies, and our colleagues from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC),

quickly reached agreement on our cooperation in the region. As rescue and rehabilitation efforts continued, we also established immediately close cooperation and coordination with all local authorities and our colleagues from the United Nations system, especially the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Let me say a few words on the message we are constantly sending, from Jakarta to Geneva and now Kobe. It is a simple message. Emergency relief must be built into national programmes of preparedness and risk reduction. Such programmes should be designed and implemented through a national body, which includes the local Red Cross or Red Crescent Society. That was agreed upon by all member States of the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in December 2003 in Geneva.

Emergency relief cannot be supplied by the international community alone. The first line of defence, as Mr. Egeland has stated, is provided by the communities themselves.

The best possible systems must be in place to provide warnings of impending disaster. Yet even the best systems cannot work without the involvement of local communities and their volunteers. Experience shows that a well-trained and well-prepared volunteer base is essential to warning people and then saving lives. That is exactly what our experience from Bam, Iran, shows.

Governments should bring their relevant laws and rules into harmony with all international instruments and the necessities imposed by disaster situations. The IFRC's international disaster response laws, rules and principles programme is all the more relevant to emergency relief in the context of today's setting — 12 countries directly affected, and a worldwide outpouring of generosity.

My delegation has been privileged to offer advice to the sponsors of the draft resolution now under discussion. The draft resolution makes important references to the need for effective risk reduction and preparedness programmes. It also notes that focus must remain steady to ensure that medium- and long-term rehabilitation and reconstruction will be carried out. Now, however, we hope to see strong support in the implementation phase of this resolution, with a focus on capacity building, especially at the community level.

We will no doubt return to the issues raised in this debate many times in the months and years ahead. It is, however, important that we do not lose sight of other priorities, which demand increasingly urgent attention from the international community. I will not detail them now, except to say that we noted with care that nearly all who spoke during the ministerial conference in Geneva on 11 January said that their pledges for the tsunami-affected countries were additional to the assistance funds that they were already providing for other humanitarian purposes.

We hope that this remains true. Despite progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, a great deal must still be done to address the poverty and despair that deprive so many people of basic human needs and dignity.

The price we all have paid in this disaster, and the tragedy of those who perished and of those who have survived mandate that we do much more, faster and better than ever before, if we are to avoid another shock of that magnitude in the future. I sincerely hope that the destructive power witnessed in the Bay of Bengal will lead to a new culture of the power of prevention.

The President (*spoke in French*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate on agenda item 39. Now we shall proceed to consider draft resolution A/59/L.58, as orally revised. I give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat.

Mr. Botnaru (General Assembly Affairs Branch): I would like to inform representatives that, in connection with draft resolution A/59/L.58, "Strengthening emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and prevention in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster", I wish to put on record the following statement on financial implications, on behalf of the Secretary-General:

> "By operative paragraph 6 of the draft resolution, the General Assembly would request the Secretary-General to appoint a special representative in order to, inter alia, sustain the political will of the international community to support medium- and long-term rehabilitation, reconstruction and risk reduction efforts led by the Governments of affected countries at all levels.

"It is envisaged that the special representative would continue to support the ongoing emergency operation, including the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the areas affected by the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster. The resources that would be required in connection with the appointment of the special representative would be financed exclusively from extra-budgetary resources.

"Therefore, should the General Assembly adopt draft resolution A/59/L.58, there would be no financial implications for the regular budget for the biennium 2004-2005."

The President (*spoke in French*): The General Assembly will take a decision on draft resolution A/59/L.58, entitled "Strengthening emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and prevention in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster", as orally revised.

Before we take a decision on the draft resolution I would like to inform the Assembly that the following countries have become sponsors of document A/59/L.58 since its issuance: Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chile, Croatia, Cuba, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Granada, Guinea, Guyana, Iceland, India, Israel, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Madagascar, Mexico, Mozambique, Namibia, Nauru, Nepal, Nigeria, Qatar, the Republic of Moldova, Samoa, Slovakia, Spain, Sudan, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Ukraine, the United States of America and Vanuatu.

May I take it that the General Assembly wishes to adopt draft resolution A/59/L.58, as orally revised?

The draft resolution, as orally revised, was adopted (resolution 59/279).

The President (*spoke in French*): The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 39.

Before I adjourn the meeting, I should like once again, on behalf of the General Assembly, to convey our most sincere condolences to the peoples and countries affected by this earthquake and tsunami of unprecedented proportions. Also, on the Assembly's behalf, I wish to pay tribute to the extraordinary efforts made by the international community to come to the assistance and succour of the populations and countries hit by the earthquake and tsunami. Lastly, I wish, also on the Assembly's behalf, to make a strong appeal for donor countries to fulfil the pledges of assistance that they have made.

The meeting rose at 11.20 a.m.